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God has given to us, I know well, the liberty of use, but only so far as necessary, and has determined that the use should be common. And it is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want. How much more glorious is it to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser to spend money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments! Whom have lands ever benefited so much as conferring favours has? It remains for us, therefore, to do away with the superfluous. And then, will have the more sumptuous things, if all select the simpler? Men, I would say, if they make use of them impartially and indifferently. But if it be impossible for all to exercise self-restraint, yet, with a view to the use of what is necessary, we must seek after what can be most readily procured, bidding a long farewell to these superfluities.

**The Church, the City, and
the Compassionate Christ**
Caleb Rosado

**La educación bíblica en
nuestra iglesia hispana**

Jorge E. Sánchez

!?

In fine, they must accordingly utterly cast off ornaments as girls' gowns, and be adorned within, and show the inner woman beautiful. For in the soul alone are beauty and deformity shown. Wherefore also only the virtuous man is really beautiful and good. And it is laid down as a dogma, that only the beautiful is good. And excellence alone appears through the beautiful body, and blossoms out in the flesh, exhibiting the amiable comeliness of self-control, whenever the character like a beam of light gleams in the form. For the beauty of each plant and animal consists in its individual excellence. And the excellence of man is righteousness, and temperance, and manliness, and godliness. The beautiful man is, then, he who is just, temperate, and in a word, good, not that he is rich. But now even the soldiers wish to be decked with gold, not having read that poetical saying:

"With childish folly to the war he came,
Laden with store of gold."

el But the love of ornament, which is far from caring for virtue, but claims the body for itself, when the love of the beautiful has changed to empty show, is to be utterly expelled.

hispano

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Year 9, No. 2, Summer, 1989

¹ *Ibid.*, ii. 872. Año 9, No. 2, Verano, 1989

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PRESENTATION

The first article in this issue is by Dr. **Caleb Rosado**, who holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Northwestern University. While serving as pastor of the All Nations Church in Berrien Springs, MI, Dr. Rosado also teaches in neighboring institutions. The present article, jointly with the one by the same author published in our last issue, form a pair in which he explores the significance of the meaning of community as we develop a Hispanic theology and ministry.

The other two articles deal with the crucial issue of biblical interpretation. The first is by the Rev. **Jorge E. Sánchez**, a United Methodist pastor in Perth Amboy, NJ, where he both serves an Anglo congregation and is in the process of starting a Hispanic mission. Although written quite independently, the reader will be aware of the points of contact between this article and the last one in this issue, by our editor **Justo L. González**. The article by Dr. González is part of a book, now in preparation, on Hispanic theology.

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The Church, the City, and the Compassionate Christ

Caleb Rosado

Introduction

"And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it" (Luke 19:41).

Tears, the temple, and the tearing masses. The picture is one of Jesus, at the beginning of the last week of his earthly ministry. Here at the beginning of this most momentous week, we find Jesus at the summit of the Mount of Lives and of his earthly career, about to descend into the valley of divine-human struggle, out of which the only exit is through death. God's Grain of Wheat is about to fall into the furrowed valley of earthly human existence at its lowest level, and die in order to bear much fruit.

Because he knows what awaits him down in that valley, Jesus lingers at the summit to reflect on the events that led him to this point and on what lies ahead. It is a contrasting scene, however, Jesus and the multitude with him. Those pressing around him cannot contain the joy they feel in their hearts, and with waving palm branches and spreading garments they shout praises to God with loud hosannas, for their long-awaited king is about to be crowned. In stark contrast, Jesus sits there pensively on the back of a colt, surrounded by the tumultuous masses, yet all alone within his own world of thought, weeping the tears of God.

There is something about coming to the end of one's ministry that always brings on moments of thoughtful and even tearful reflection. Have I accomplished all that I set out to do? Have people responded as expected? What has hindered people from reaching their full potential? What can I do in these last moments left as a final attempt to alter conditions hindering human response? Questions like these must have gone through Jesus' mind as he reflected over the city, from the brow of the hill, one last time.

The Tears of God

The text draws a picture of Jesus weeping over the city. "When he saw the city," the Bible declares, "he wept over it." Why did Jesus weep? What is there about the city that moves God to tears? The answer may lie in the nature of the city.

A city is "a dense concentration of people in a relatively small geographic area and engaged in nonagricultural pursuits," which activities "are specialized and functionally interrelated, and governed by a formalized political system."¹ Essentially a city is comprised of two components: people and a network of institutions which gives meaning to their collective existence. A city is people and institutions, which define their place and proper behavior in society.

¹George A. Theodorson and Achilles G., Theodorson, *A Modern Dictionary of Sociology* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979), p. 46.

We are all surrounded by institutions. Collective group life is not possible without the many social institutions that impact and govern our lives from the moment of birth. Institutions —these interrelated systems of social roles and norms— exist for the satisfaction of human needs. When institutions, however, turn inward and focus primarily or exclusively on their own needs for survival or quest for power, the strewn wreckage of human life whose needs are laid waste is the visible result.

In Matthew 9:35-36, the writer declares:

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

For Jesus, the city was the masses of humanity, harassed, hopeless and helpless, for whom the institutions of society had failed to provide their basic needs and meaning for their lives. The city is people, people struggling for a meaningful existence, whether they are among the rich and surrounded by goods in exclusive suburbs or among the wretched poor and socially naked in the barrios and ghettos.

Why did Jesus weep? One reason could have been because of his identification with humanity, especially with suffering, oppressed and rejected humanity. Jesus realized that the vast majority of the population, as in Third World cities, is comprised of the poor, the lowly, the oppressed and rejected ones. Especially was this true of those living in Galilee. For Galilee, as the northernmost district of Palestine surrounded on all sides by gentile nations separating it from Judea to the south, was symbolic of that which the world rejects and regards as unimportant. It was a multicultural, multiracial region, biologically and culturally mixed, and its people were, in every sense of the word, a *mestizo* people —mixed humanity.

Galilee was the land of the rejected, the despised, the outcasts, the revolutionaries and the foreigners. Their racial and cultural *mestizaje*, their constant contact with gentiles and heathens, resulted in the Galileans being despised by the "pure" Jews of Jerusalem to the south, who saw themselves as the sole heirs of cultural, racial and religious purity.

We cannot begin to understand the feelings of Judean Jews towards Galilean, unless we understand the Jewish insistence on ancestral and racial purity.¹ The Jews held that only Israelites of pure ancestry made up the pure Israel. Thus, "even the simple Israelite knew his immediate ancestors and could point to which of the twelve tribes he belonged." After the exile, genealogies became important in order to separate pure families from those racially mixed, as a result of the racial-mixing practices of the Assyrians. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, written after the exile, are all filled with genealogical lists. We often

¹. This section on ancestral and racial purity is taken from Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 275-302.

wonder why all the fuss over genealogies. In the post-exilic period, these lists were important in order to determine who was pure Israelite. A person could not be a priest unless they could prove their ancestral purity to at least five generations. No person could hold a public office who was not of pure ancestry, nor would they associate in court or in public office with person whose ancestry was of doubt. Proof of pure ancestry was important for a woman to marry into a priestly family.

The most important reason for proof of ancestral purity, however, had to do with religion and salvation. If one came up short of merits in the judgment, the merits of Abraham could be added to one's account, so as to assure salvation. However, only those who could trace their lineage to Abraham would have access to his merits. Thus a person's salvation depended on the ancestral purity. Then too, prophecy had declared that before the coming of the end of the age, the prophet Elijah would return "to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to their children," (Malachi 4:5-6). In other words, Elijah would restore the family to its ancestral purity so that people would be ready for the final salvation.

Joachim Jeremias declares:

Only families of pure Israelite descent could be assured of a share in the messianic salvation, for only they were assisted by the 'merit of their legitimate ancestry.' Here we have the most profound reason for the behaviour of these pure Israelite families —why they examined the genealogies of their future sons— and daughters-in-law before marriage. For on this question of racial purity hung not only the social position of their descendants, but indeed their final assurance of salvation, their share in the future redemption of Israel.¹

This meant that Galileans, by virtue of their racial and cultural *mestizaje*, were prevented from holding any position of social merit; and of worse consequence, they had no share in the final salvation of Israel, but were despised and rejected, even by God! Thus they had no chance of being saved, none whatsoever ...until Jesus came along!

In identifying with lost, suffering, oppressed, dejected and rejected, multiracial humanity, Jesus was putting into effect what Virgilio Elizondo calls, "the Galilean Principle": "What human beings reject, God chooses as his very own."² The apostle Paul proclaims this principle in 1 Corinthians, where he declares:

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God

¹. *Ibid.*, pp. 301-302.

². Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 91.

chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (1:26-29).

A second reason why Jesus wept, and closely related with the first, was because the proclaimers of truth, the spiritual leaders of the nation, had become the ones that barred people from God. The reason why the people suffered and were "like sheep without a shepherd," was because the spiritual shepherds of Israel had sold them out for gain. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against people; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in" (Matthew 23:13).

This helps explain Jesus' words in Matthew 23:38, "Behold, your house is left to you desolate." "Since you would not accept the One of whom Isaiah the prophet wrote: 'He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not,' therefore, your house, your beautiful temple, is left desolate, empty and forsaken. I'd rather be born in a stable where the shepherds, the rejected one; where the magi, the foreigners, are all welcome to visit and worship me."

One of the challenges facing the centers of ministerial training in the nation is how to respond to the newest comers to society (who have actually been here all along but relegated to an invisible status). People who come from predominantly Roman Catholic Latin American countries to the urban centers of America don't always feel welcomed by their Irish Catholic counterparts, and Protestantism, because of its strong individualism, leads many to lose their sense of group identity.

Let me explain: Spain's conquest of the New World was through the joint effort of church and state. The two were inseparable; it marked all aspects of life, including the layout of cities, the *pueblos*, around the central plaza, with the state house at one end and the church at the other, for "no community could exist unless God were a member of it."¹ In the center, communal life took place—the fiestas, the market, the religious celebrations, the gathering of people to play, to converse, to experience community—all within the shadow of both church and state. In Spanish, the word *pueblo* meant more than just living in the city or town; it meant to belong to a community, to experience peoplehood, and the community was Catholic. "When a Latin American said he was *católico*, or, more commonly, *muy católico*, very Catholic, he did not necessarily mean he had been at Mass or the sacraments; he simply meant that he was a member of a people, a *people*, which was Catholic."² When Latino Catholics come to the United States, where religion is more of a private matter, they discover the presence of the Church, but

¹. Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans: the Meaning of Migration to the Mainland* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p.116.

². *Ibid.*

not the presence of the *pueblo*, that sense of community and peoplehood is missing. They thus experience alienation and rejection, even in their own church. Protestantism gives them a rediscovery of a personal God, but divorced from the sense of community, *el pueblo*. And the result is a loss of identity and a loss of a sense of peoplehood, and a ceasing to be Latino.

Historic Catholic centers, such as Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles, are "communal living rooms," which don't always make the new comers feel at home, nor desire to share the same living space with them. This sense of loss of community results in much of the negative social behavior impacting Latino barrios in our large urban centers. An alternate behavior, however, is that in their quest for community, as a consequence of experiencing alienation and anomie in the cities, a large number of Latinos, especially Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, are turning to Pentecostalism—the religion of the urban poor in America—which has become the substitute for *el pueblo*.¹

Our historic centers of theological training must endeavor, in their ministry to Latinos, to give them not only a proper understanding of God, but in the process seek to connect them back to their community, their *pueblo*. For a person can only experience a genuine sense of human dignity and pride in who they are as an integral member of a community, and not in isolation from it.

This means that the church and its educational establishments must be sensitive to the needs of society, and like its Master, take on "human flesh" and identify with lost humanity. Like Christ, it must come "down" from its holy, sanitized and antiseptic environment, and become one with the people it is trying to reach. The Church must know their needs, hear their cries, and understand all the factors that make up their situation of despair, distance and distress.

Blacks and Chicanos use expressions in reference to members of their own ethnic groups which are descriptive of their closeness to each other. Male Blacks refer to each other as "brothers," while male Chicanos address each other as "carnales" [of the same flesh]. The Bible tells us that Jesus is our brother, and by taking on human flesh he became our *carnal*. That's the meaning of the incarnation, becoming one flesh with humanity. That is what incarnational ministry is all about—taking on "flesh" and identifying with the needs of humanity. We need to stop kidding ourselves that we are doing ministry, when all along our moral hangups and leprous attitudes towards others who differ from us whether by religion, race or class, are keeping us from doing genuine, Christ-like, incarnational ministry. Such detachness is more reminiscent of the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

A third reason why Jesus wept was because the people—both the masses and the religious leaders—did not fully understand the power and the purposes of God for humankind. Thus, in the end he was rejected by all, both Galilean and Judean, for they both misunderstood his intent and mission of creating a new humanity unto himself.

¹Renato Poblete and Thomas F. O'Dea, "Anomie and the 'Quest for Community': The Formation of Sects Among the Puerto Ricans of New York," *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 21, No. 1 (1960), pp. 18-36.

Why did God select Galilee, that mestitized, despised region of the earth as the place that would mark God's son's identity for life? The answer is found in Hebrews 2:17, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest."

A new Christ is beginning to be experienced in the church today —Jesus the Galilean. He is replacing the "Generic Christ," the Christ of the universal pulpit, which has prevailed for too long in the church. This is the Christ similar to generic foods, with no market-specific identity, just a universal label stating what he is. As a result the quality of the goods tends to be inferior. You are not always too sure what you are getting —just general fodder to appease the masses. The high quality of the Divine Product, based on the market-specific needs of the different people, is missing.

For this reason the Apostle Paul never preached a "Generic Christ," but a market-specific one:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, . . . that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law, . . . that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow-partaker of it (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

What does it mean to be Black to reach Blacks? What does it mean to be a Latino to reach Latinos? What does it mean to be a woman to reach women for Christ? That's preaching! Genuine contextual preaching! And the Christ that is being preached is a market-specific one —Jesus the Galilean. And to this Christ, who has identified with their specific needs, women, Asians, Blacks, Latinos and Whites are responding with a resounding "Yes." As for the "Generic Christ" of the colonial, ethnocentric, Western Church, concerned with homogeneity and uniformity, he is no longer acceptable to the needs of a multicultural world, but is a product of a by-gone age.

As a nation we have moved from an agrarian society concerned with conformity, through an industrial society, concerned with uniformity, to the new information society concerned with diversity in a global context. Yet in this information age of cultural diversity and pluralism, the church is still pushing the outmoded industrial society's assembly-line model of uniformity, as a methodology for mission. The current "English only" movement in education and the Homogeneous Unit Principle of the church growth movement, are both examples of nostalgic methodologies of a by-gone age.

In a multicultural society where the focus is on diversity, the church must develop a model of multicultural ministry based on unity in diversity in Christ. A new age demands new methods! Therefore, in order to stay relevant, our schools of theology must not only respond to change, they must *anticipate* it!

A Compassionate Christ

What is this character trait of Christ that moves him to tears in view of the human condition? It is *compassion*, the compassion of God. Compassion is a rare commodity in the world today for it can only be generated by God. Compassion is a divine character quality that only comes from God and not from human hearts. Throughout the Four Gospels compassion is only found with reference to Jesus or mentioned by him. It is a divine plant of heavenly origin, and its source is heaven not earth. Whenever it is manifested by human beings, it is because God has moved upon the heart, whether or not they declare themselves to be children of God.

This is the declaration of John in 3 John 11: "Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God." This text does not judge people on the basis of their beliefs, but on the basis of their behavior. Nothing is said of their beliefs. It is people's behavior that determines whether they are of God, and not what they believe.

The tears of God, therefore, as seen in Jesus' behavior while overlooking the city of Jerusalem, reflect that aspect of character which motivated God to identify with suffering and separated humanity—his compassion!

Confronting the Structures of Oppression

But tears are not enough. All the emoting in the world does not remove suffering. Definitive action needs to take place. Jesus does not let it rest at mere weeping, but moves to relieve the suffering. This is the difference between sympathy and compassion. Sympathy looks down with teary-eyed pity and says, "Oh, I am so sorry." Compassion *comes down* with caring concern and says, "Can I be of help?" Compassion always moves from affection to action.

Thus, as his one last act, Jesus, like Jeremiah of old, takes on the single most important yet oppressive institutional structure of his day—the temple in Jerusalem—and cleanses it (Matthew 21:12-16). Paulo Freire declares: It is an "illusion that the hearts of men and women can be transformed while the social structure which make those hearts 'sick' are left intact and unchanged."¹

The time for healing the sick, and preaching good news to the poor, and proclaiming release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, and setting at liberty those who are oppressed, is over! The day of the Lord has arrived; the day of vengeance of our God. This is Judgment Day! People, it is closing time! And no deceptive theology of institutionalism based on "this is the temple of the Lord, therefore we are safe!" can alter the verdict.

The central purpose of this act and the meaning behind its significance, was Jesus' desire to give the people and the religious leaders of his day, and every day since, a new understanding of the nature of God, and that all people's, no matter their race, class or gender, have equal access to him.

It must be understood that the reason why all this legalized exploitation was permitted in the temple, was because of the understanding of God of the chief priests' and scribes --the theologians.

¹. Paulo Freire, "Education, Liberation and the Church," *Risk*, 9:3, 1973, p. 34.

God, therefore, became the biggest exploiter. Because Jewish society in Jesus' day was a religio-political society, structured by and centered around the temple and the worship of a God who sanctioned this exploitation, the entire nation and its social structures were organized in harmony with this domineering, patriarchal concept of God. Jesus, by cleaning the temple, was putting an end to this socially constructed God, who benefited the powerful, and replaced it with the God of compassion, who came to serve humanity.

In declaring, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17), Jesus was announcing the new universalism of God and an end to all exclusivisms —no one would be excluded from the presence of God.¹ The temple officials had so structured the layout of the temple so as to exclude people from entry into the temple. There was the Court of Women, beyond which women could not go; then there was the Court of Israel, the men's court, beyond which men could not enter; and finally there was the Court of Priests, where only priests were allowed. In his declaration of universalism, Jesus, by breaking down the dividing wall of hostility that created social barriers in people's access to God (Ephesians 2:14-16), was proclaiming a new redemptive social order: *That all of God's children are one and have equal access to God.* "There is neither Jew nor Greek [no division based on racial and ethnic differences], there is neither slave nor free [no division based on social class], there is neither male nor female [no division based on sex and gender]; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Therefore, the keeping out of women and ethnic minorities from full access to the temple is a human construction that flies in the face of the purposes of God for all humankind.

And just to make sure that this new truth was not misunderstood as to God's intention, when Jesus expired his last on the cross, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). This final act made it clear that the very presence of God, symbolized by the Holy of Holies, is now accessible to all, bar none. Women, gentiles and the laity had been excluded; now they all have free access to the temple. There are now no more holy places, for Jesus himself is the Temple. And where two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus promised he would be in their midst (Matthew 18:20).

Matthew tells us that after driving out the money-changers, the blind, the lame and the children came to Jesus and he healed and blessed them. By this action Jesus showed what God was really like, a God of compassion; and what true worship was all about, serving humanity at their deepest level of need.

This must be the mission of our centers of theological training.

Conclusion

God wants to convert our elaborate, expensive and exclusive temples, where often there is no room for people who might be different from us, into stables where all of humanity can come and worship him freely in open, loving oneness, without distinction.

¹. Elizondo, 1983, p. 73.

Therein lies the significance of Jesus the Galilean, for Galilee, the "stables" of the world, has become the dwelling place of God. The end result will be the turning of stable into temples—his Holy Temple—and the turning of temples, the human constructions of exclusiveness, into forsaken, desolate stable. But Jesus is first born in a stable, and then converts that stable into the Temple of the living God.

Resumen

A base del pasaje en el que Jesús llora sobre Jerusalén, el autor pasa a señalar que hay dos elementos constitutivos de una ciudad: las personas y las instituciones que las unen e interrelacionan. El Cristo que llora sobre la ciudad llora precisamente porque las estructuras de opresión les impiden a las personas de la ciudad ver la obra redentora y liberadora de Dios. Hoy la iglesia toda está redescubriendo un nuevo Cristo, el Cristo compasivo que llora sobre la ciudad, que es también siempre un Cristo muy específico. El "Cristo genérico" no reta a nadie. Es el Cristo específico el que reta las estructuras históricas de opresión. Al redescubrir este Cristo, redescubrimos lo que es la compasión, y vemos que la misión de la iglesia es ir ante todo a los "pesebres" del mundo actual.

La educación bíblica en nuestra iglesia hispana

Jorge E. Sánchez

En nuestros días hay un creciente interés en la lectura y estudio de la Biblia. El fundamentalismo, basado en unos principios "de regresar a la Biblia", continúa siendo muy influyente en la vida y en la opinión pública. Los evangelistas de la televisión predicán con absoluta autoridad encontrando textos bíblicos que sostienen sus convicciones. Hoy, el fundamentalismo religioso cruza las fronteras nacionales y de la fe, alimentando el fervor pero también la represión en el mundo.

Otro tipo de estudio de "regreso a la Biblia" es expresado en un renovado intento de buscar las raíces de nuestra identidad como cristianos. Una generación atrás, el énfasis de la educación cristiana era en la doctrina o en la aplicación de la fe cristiana en la vida diaria. Hoy, el énfasis está más bien enfocado en la narrativa bíblica y en la búsqueda de significado para el mundo en que vivimos. La iglesia hispana deberá experimentar el crecimiento y deberá hallar su identidad

en la antigua historia bíblica, una historia que une a las gentes de diversos orígenes en un vínculo común.

Un estilo hispano de escuchar la Palabra

El hispano está dispuesto a escuchar la Palabra de Dios dentro del contexto de nuestra liturgia de adoración. Las Escrituras hebreas son escogidas para que iluminen el texto de los Evangelios. (Prefiero utilizar "Escrituras hebreas" en lugar de "Antiguo Testamento" por reconocer que aquellas fueron escritas como el primer registro de las relaciones de Dios con su pueblo hebreo y que luego fueron adoptadas por los cristianos. No quiero implicar que las Escrituras hebreas sólo existen, o existieron, para prefigurar el Evangelio de Jesucristo.)

Cuando leemos la Biblia, siempre pausamos un momento para dejar que el mensaje bíblico llegue muy adentro de nuestro corazón. En silencio, dejamos que las historias bíblicas y su mensaje nos influyan de gran manera. El silencio, luego de la lectura, nos hace reflexionar profundamente. Nos hace que recordemos nuestra relación de amor con Dios. Comenzamos también el proceso de construir nuestra respuesta al llamado de Dios a serle testigos en nuestro mundo.

Lo que hemos decidido *no* leer en la adoración pública es el resultado directo de cómo nos relacionamos con la Escritura. Por ejemplo, muchos han decidido que las palabras del Apóstol Pablo acerca de que las mujeres deberán cubrirse sus cabezas al orar (I Corintios 11:5-6) no son apropiadas como directrices para nosotros en el día de hoy. Muchos decidimos qué porciones de la Biblia son las más relevantes. Podemos leer de libros llamados apócrifos como el Libro de la Sabiduría y El Eclesiástico, que algunos cristianos no consideran dignos de ser incluidos en la colección de nuestra Biblia. Sin embargo, ¿cuánto uso damos y cuántos de nosotros leemos de Crónicas, Proverbios, Eclesiastés, de la mayor parte de los profetas menores, de Levítico o Números?

Los creyentes hispanos, al igual que los demás cristianos, hacemos un buen uso de la razón. No nos limitamos a la palabra impresa solamente sino también a la realidad envolvente que la Palabra que Dios habla a la era presente. El Espíritu Santo de Dios nos da el don de la inspiración que nos guía para dar razonamientos de nuevo entendimiento en una sociedad en cambio constante.

El proceso de raciocinio interpretativo se realiza entre la gente que forma la comunidad de fe que es la Iglesia de Cristo. Dios no nos llama como individuos a vivir aisladamente sino como parte de la comunidad mundial de creyentes que luchan juntos para vivir la realidad de las implicaciones de una revelación que mira siempre hacia el futuro. La Escritura es leída por "nosotros" en la congregación de creyentes y no por "mi" en la soledad individualista en búsqueda de entendimiento. En el momento en que Jesús habló, sus palabras fueron interpretadas y fueron aplicadas como resultado de una situación dada y particular. Para el tiempo en que las palabras de Jesús fueron recogidas por la Iglesia y puestas por escrito en rollos y pergaminos y compartidas como la auténtica revelación de Dios, la Iglesia razonó y articuló una interpretación que sería aceptada como parte integral de la revelación misma. Este proceso viviente sucede en cada generación subsiguiente. La Palabra de Dios *no* es estática, sino que es viviente. Esto es lo que la encarnación de Dios en Cristo proclama al mundo.

Un estilo de interpretación de las Escrituras

Una sesión de estudio bíblico requiere un primer paso: mirar hacia el trasfondo histórico, literario y teológico del texto. Esto significa hacer preguntas acerca del significado de las palabras, el contexto cultural en el cual las palabras fueron escritas y el entendimiento que los lectores originales del texto tuvieron cuando lo leyeron o escucharon por primera vez. Segundo, ¿qué es lo que el texto que estudiamos quiere decirnos a los cristianos *hoy*? Debemos permitirle a la Palabra de Dios que haga surgir preguntas en nosotros. ¿Cuáles son las buenas nuevas y cuáles son las malas en nuestras vidas que nos llaman al arrepentimiento y a la conversión? Aquí le permitimos al pasaje bíblico (el texto) que nos hable a la situación del momento. Tomamos las metáforas e imágenes de la Escritura y dejamos que ellas entren en nuestra conciencia. Como nuestros sentimientos y emociones juegan un papel importante en esta parte del estudio, debemos estar receptivos a la emoción que no se espera y que surge espontáneamente mientras dejamos que alguna frase del texto haga su función en nuestras mentes.

La Biblia es la historia de los creyentes, no de una sola persona. El texto pertenece al pueblo de Dios llamado al pacto. Por lo tanto, debemos bregar con el pasaje bíblico con la comunidad de creyentes en mente. Aún cuando la Escritura nos toca personalmente, ya que nos llama a responder, la respuesta deberá ser dada en un contexto social. No estamos bregando con una búsqueda religiosa privada y personalista sino con el testigo público de la justicia de Dios. ¿Qué es lo que dice el pasaje bíblico a la vida política de la nación y del mundo? ¿Qué asuntos resalta para nosotros el texto, siendo nosotros el pueblo de Dios?

Un diálogo de dos personas sobre un texto bíblico puede abarcar más potencial interpretativo que si sólo una persona lo hiciera. El estudio en grupo puede resaltar mejor el proceso de descubrimiento cuando los miembros de la iglesia comparten comentarios y conocimientos.

Un estilo de ver la Biblia

La Biblia es la historia de cómo el pueblo de la fe vio y respondió a la acción de Dios en la historia. Cada libro de la Biblia es el registro de lo que una gente en particular, en un período particular, quiso decir de su experiencia con Dios.

La Biblia es el depósito de las respuestas humanas al llamado de Dios en su acción en las vidas de los creyentes. De igual manera, la Biblia nos llama a reaccionar de la misma forma. Para ayudarnos a formular una respuesta, la Biblia ofrece ejemplos de lo que otros hicieron y dijeron a través de las narrativas históricas, la literatura sapiencial, los dichos de los profetas, los Evangelios y otros tipos de escritos.

Podemos responder a esos ejemplos tomándolos como reglas y contestaciones a nuestras preguntas de fe. Muy a menudo la Biblia se ha utilizado de esa manera: si tenemos un problema vamos a la Biblia y buscamos cierto pasaje y encontramos la contestación. La Biblia, sin embargo, como el depósito de la respuesta del creyente, nos llama a *no* aceptar automáticamente y a estar de acuerdo sino a escoger y ponderar alternativas con libertad.

Necesitamos ver ejemplos en la Biblia en su contexto histórico y pensarlos con las realidades de nuestro tiempo y situación a la vez que los comparamos con las tradiciones de nuestra iglesia. La Biblia *no* nos dice qué hacer. La Biblia nos

informa sobre quiénes somos: criaturas de Dios que hemos sido libertadas para responder al llamado de amor de Dios. Estudiamos lo que otras personas respondieron a ese llamado al leer la Biblia, y esto ilumina nuestro corazón para responder de igual manera. No tenemos garantías de que nuestra respuesta sea la correcta aun cuando seguimos al pie de la letra lo que dice la Escritura. Lo que sí tenemos es la garantía de que Dios nos ama y quiere reconciliarnos consigo por medio de Jesucristo. A través del estudio de la Biblia examinamos nuestras vidas y escogemos la mejor respuesta al llamado de Dios.

Una palabra final

Las metáforas utilizadas para descubrir a Dios en la Biblia incluyen términos tanto masculinos como femeninos, ya que la experiencia de Dios recoge toda la gama de las relaciones humanas. Dios no es ni masculino ni femenino y sin embargo su presencia se puede sentir en el ser humano de manera que parezca congruente a nuestros géneros masculinos y femeninos. De vez en cuando, las experiencias evolutivas bíblicas que se tienen de Dios aparentan contradecirse mutuamente. El Dios guerrero que se percibe y experimenta en Josué riñe con nuestra imagen del Dios amoroso y conciliador revelado por Jesús. La Biblia nos llama a responder a todas estas imágenes y conceptos de la experiencia de Dios cuando descubrimos quiénes somos en esta continua y profunda relación que tenemos los creyentes con Dios. La Biblia no es, pues, un libro de reglamentos que determina la forma correcta de vivir la vida. La Biblia es la historia fundamental y subyacente que provee al creyente de su identidad como miembro del cuerpo de Cristo.

Summary

Bible study in the Hispanic community must recover the dimension of communal reading for which Scripture was intended. It must take into account the historical setting and meaning of the text, and then move on to what it says to us today. Also, the Bible is not to be read as a book of rules or of answers, but rather as a book that lets us see our place in history, and how others at other places in history have responded to the challenges of their situation. As the author puts it, "the Bible is not a rule-book that determines the correct way of life. The Bible is the fundamental and undergirding history that provides the believer with an identity as a member of the body of Christ."

Reading the Bible in Spanish

Justo L. González

To someone who condemned substituting the Revised Standard Version for the "original" King James, I once replied that the Bible was originally written in Spanish, and that God then translated it into Hebrew and Greek because at that time no one knew Spanish yet. Such tongue-in-cheek chauvinism, which may have served its function then, is not what I mean by "reading the Bible in Spanish." Nor do I mean the obvious of reading it in a Spanish translation. What I mean is much more than that: if it is true that we bring a particular perspective to history and to theology, then we must also bring a particular perspective to the interpretation of Scripture. And, once again, it may be that this perspective will prove useful, not only to us, but also to the church at large.

A Non-innocent History

A point at which this is true is the relationship between our non-innocent reading of our own history, and the manner in which Scripture presents the history of the people of God, for this too is history beyond innocence.

Indeed, it would be difficult for anyone who reads the Bible carefully, going beyond the level of "Bible stories," to idealize its heroes. Abraham pretends that Sarah is his sister in order to save his own skin, and allows Pharaoh to lie with her without even knowing that he is taking a married woman. Jacob is the trickster par-excellence, who robs his brother of his inheritance, and his father-in-law of his sheep. The Israelites who move into Egypt are the descendants, not only of Joseph, but also of his brothers who sold him into slavery and then lied to their father. At the time of the Exodus, Moses is not too eager to take up his calling, and the Israelites refuse to follow his lead, yearn for the fleshpots of Egypt, complain about their monotonous diet of manna, and in general prove themselves to be fickle and faithless. When they arrive at the Promised Land, they hesitate, because the inhabitants of the land seem to them like giants, and make them feel like grasshoppers.

The entire book of Judges is a cycle of apostasy, punishment, repentance, and redemption, only to fall into renewed apostasy:

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them. And yet they did not listen to their judges; for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed down to them; they soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers. (Judges 2:16-19)

Even the heroes of this book are not knights in shining armor. Gideon, after all his exploits, collects as a tribute the golden earrings of his followers, and with them makes an idol which even he and his family worship. His son then becomes a tyrant who, among other crimes, kills seventy of his brothers. And Samson, of whom in our childhood we were told beautiful stories of bravery, is a social climber and a wenching fool.

Then the kingdom is established, and here again the story is not unambiguous. From the very beginning, there were those who saw the establishment of the kingdom as an apostasy, for Israel was simply imitating the customs of her neighbors, and thereby rejecting her only king, Yahweh. The first king is both a success and a failure, and his dynasty is discontinued. Then comes David, the great king who however has one of his generals killed in order to take his wife, and who is not even aware of the enormity of his crime until Nathan points it out to him. Solomon asked God for wisdom, and was able to build his temple. But he used his power for his own glory, accumulating riches against the will of God, and eventually falling into idolatry. Then the kingdom was divided, and followed a checkered history until both Samaria and Jerusalem fell. All the while, numerous prophets pointed out the many evils and injustices which the kings and others who held power condoned and even promoted. Thus, the minority reports of the prophets came to occupy a larger part of Scripture than the chronicles of the kings. But even such chronicles did not spare the kings, for in them we find the records of their achievements as well as of their failure and their crimes. Nor do the prophets escape unscathed, for they too are depicted as human beings with flaws and mixed motives.

The New Testament view of history is no more innocent. It opens with a genealogy to which we would do well to pay more attention. Look, for instance, at the women mentioned in it. The first is Tamar, out of whose incestuous union with Judah were born Perez and Zerah. Then comes Rahab, the harlot of Jericho who hid the Israelite spies and thus saved her life and her family. Ruth, the wife of Boaz, is a Gentile. "And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah." Finally, the last woman mentioned is Mary, to those who were "in the know" a woman chosen by God, but to the world at large -- and to Joseph himself until he is brought in on the "secret" -- the unwed mother of an illegitimate son. This is very different from the "innocent" genealogies so common among those who today wish to show that their privileges come from long-established rights, and who very carefully hide the skeletons in their genealogical closets.

The disciples and the early church fare no better. The disciples are confused, and in the end all but one abandon their teacher. Nor is this something which is completely overcome by the events of Pentecost, for the legends of the great deeds of the apostles, travelling throughout the world preaching the gospel, have very little basis in the New Testament -- or in fact. Those of whom we know, particularly Peter, were about as confused after Pentecost as they were before, for the Holy Spirit kept surprising them with unexpected calls to obedience. Then among the believers were such people as Ananias and Saphira, Simon Magus, the "saints" in Corinth, the Judaizers who invaded Paul's Galatian churches, and the lukewarm Laodiceans of the Book of Revelation.

In short, Biblical history is a history beyond innocence. Its only real heroes are the God of history, and history itself, which somehow continues moving forward even in spite of the failure of its great protagonists. Since this is also the nature of Hispanic history, it may well be that on this score we have a hermeneutical advantage over those whose history is still at the level of guilty innocence, and who therefore must read Scripture in the same way in which they read their own history.

To those who think of their own history in terms of high ideals and purity, this may seem to detract from the power and inspiration of Scripture. This, however, is not the case with Hispanics. We know that we are born out of an act of violence of cosmic proportions in which our Spanish forefathers raped our Indian foremothers. We have no skeletons in our closet. Our skeletons are at the very heart of our history and our reality as a people. Therefore, we are comforted when we read the genealogy of Jesus, and find there, not only a Gentile like ourselves, but also an incest, and what amounts to David's rape of Bathsheba. The Gospel writer did not hide the skeletons in Jesus' closet, but listed them, so that we may know that the Savior has really come to be one of us --not just one of the high and the mighty, the aristocratic with impeccable blood lines, but one of us.

The Consequence of an Innocent Reading of Scripture

The alternative is a selective reading of Scripture, similar to the selective reading of American history to which I have already referred. Ben Franklin must be seen as an intellectual, a diplomat, and even an eccentric, but not as a man casting a greedy eye on Indian lands. Likewise, Jacob's cheating, his sons' near fratricide, the wavering of the Israelites, Gideon's apostasy, Samson's folly, David's murderous adultery, Solomon's combination of wisdom and lack of it, and all other similar events must either be ignored or treated as the unfortunate background for what still amounts to an innocent history.

Such idealization of history is much easier when we come to the New Testament, where the early church is raised to the status of a perfect model for us. We thus wish we could "preach like Paul", when the truth is that Paul could on occasion preach his hearers to sleep! That the early church has a certain paradigmatic authority is not to be denied. But this does not have to be equated with guiltless perfection -- which itself, paradoxically enough, would destroy the value of the paradigm for us.

The relative ease with which guiltless history can be read into the New Testament has led to a disparagement of the Old Testament among those who still believe in innocent history. If our history is one of great, and almost sinless, heroes, it is difficult to claim that the messy history of the Old Testament is somehow a Word of God to us. From such perspective, the most we can do is to read the Old Testament at the level of "Bible stories." A book of "Bible stories" usually includes the story of David and Goliath, but not of David and Bathsheba; the story of Solomon's wisdom threatening to divide the disputed baby, but not of Solomon's idolatry. This is a subtle way of disparaging the Old Testament, for it amounts to improving on it. We are afraid that the violent and otherwise questionable narratives of the Old Testament would pollute our children's minds, and therefore we pollute them with a truncated view which parallels the view of American history with which they are being raised.

Such "Bible stories" are not politically or socially neutral. They have an agenda, albeit hidden from the children who read them, from us who buy and distribute them, and even from those who write them. The agenda is precisely to promote an innocent reading of history. The parallels between the "Bible stories" read in our Sunday Schools and the "American stories" which pass for history in our daily schools are striking. In both cases, the great heroes are depicted as people of pure and unmixed motives, clear conscience, and undeviating righteousness. If such is the story of the great Bible heroes, and of the great American heroes, biblical faith and flag-waving go hand in hand. And this history, as already noted, serves to justify the present order as the result of the great deeds of those past heroes.

Innocent history is a selective forgetfulness, used precisely to avoid the consequences of a more realistic memory. A striking example of this is found in John 8:31-33, where, after Jesus speaks his famous words, "the truth shall make you free," some of his listeners answer, "We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one. How is it you say, 'You will be made free'?" Incredible selective forgetfulness which allows them to remember that they are descendants of Abraham, and to forget that between Abraham and themselves stand bondage in Egypt, exile in Babylon, and now servitude to Rome! Incredible, and innocent. Innocent, and guilty, for its function is to avoid listening to the radical word Jesus is announcing, which would require unwelcome changes.

Responsible remembrance, on the other hand, leads to responsible action. A clear example is in the repeated injunction to Israel: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:21). "Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). And, an even more radical consequence of that memory of pilgrimage, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). For white North-Americans to remember that they are immigrants, and that the land is not theirs, would lead to an attitude towards the original inhabitants of the land, and towards more recent immigrants, which the present order cannot bear. Forgetfulness is the easy way out, just as it was for the children of Abraham who refused to remember their bondage in Egypt.

Therefore, part of our responsibility as Hispanics, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of other minorities as well as for the sake of the dominant group, is constantly to remind that group that they too are immigrants, to remind them of the Indian massacres, of the rape of the land, of the war with Mexico, of riches drawn from slave labor, of neo-colonial exploitation, and of any other guilty items which they may be inclined to forget in their innocent reading of history.

The Word of God in the Older Testament

The disparagement of the Old Testament has often been a temptation for Christians. Already in the second century, Marcion claimed that the Old Testament was the word of a different god who was not the Father of Jesus Christ. The god of the Old Testament, the creator god, is involved in this material and unhappy world, which he made either out of spite or out of ignorance, and which he now rules on the basis of law and judgment. God the Father, on the other hand, is a God of grace and forgiveness, who rules in love, and who promises salvation out of this evil and material world. The early church saw clearly that

Marcion's doctrines were incompatible with many of its fundamental teachings, such as creation, the incarnation of Jesus Christ in true flesh, and the resurrection of the body. For this reason, it rejected his teachings -- indeed, the core of our present Apostles' Creed was composed in order to make clear that those who held to apostolic faith rejected Marcion's views.¹

Yet Marcionism, in disguised and somewhat mitigated forms, has been a constant temptation for Christians. The way it is most often heard in our churches and Sunday Schools is the notion -- which is historically false -- that the Old Testament speaks of God as law-giver and judge, whereas Jesus' great contribution was to speak of the love of God, and to call God "Father." A slightly more sophisticated semi-Marcionism is even more prevalent, and stands at the root of the "Bible stories" to which I have already referred. This semi-Marcionism holds that, since Jesus is the final and supreme revelation of God, the whole of Scripture is to be read and interpreted from the viewpoint of His message. This is true as far as it goes. But it forgets that, since the Old Testament is the history of God's revelation and action in preparation for the coming of Christ, the message of Jesus must also be interpreted in the light of that revelation and action. In other words, the argument of the new semi-Marcionites fails in that it takes for granted that, without the preparation of the Old Testament, we know what Jesus' message is. History shows that this is not true, for in the early church, as increasing numbers of Gentiles began to join the Christian community, it was clear that these Gentiles needed the background of the Old Testament in order to understand what the message was all about. Otherwise, they risked viewing Christianity as the gnostics and Marcion did. It was for this reason that Christian leaders insisted on the authority of the Old Testament. Today, there is no guarantee that, in the midst of a society that is all the more pagan because it no longer even sees the radical difference between paganism and biblical faith, we can understand the message of Jesus any better than could the early Gentile converts. For that reason, while it is true that we are to interpret the Old Testament in the light of God's revelation in Jesus, it is also true that we are to understand the latter in light of the Old Testament. It is in order to signify this that I refer to the Old Testament as the "Older" Testament. In our common usage, the word "old" has the connotation of "obsolete," and therefore the term "Old Testament," particularly in contrast to the "New" Testament, tends to support our present semi-Marcionite heresy.²

If the Older Testament too is the Word of God, it follows that we cannot understand the Newer Testament in such a way that it appears that the Older Testament is on the whole unrelated to the Newer. This happens, for instance, when we understand "spirituality" in terms of detachment from the world and its political realities, for it is clear that most of the Older Testament is dealing with

¹See J. L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), pp. 000-00.

²In Spanish, we call the Older Testament "el Antiguo Testamento." The word "antiguo," unlike "old," does not have the connotation of being outdated or surpassed.

such realities. To this I shall return in another chapter, when dealing with what I term "political spirituality." For the time being, let it suffice to raise the question of how is it possible for what we usually call "spirituality" to be central to the Bible, and yet almost unheard of in the Older Testament. Such a question should prompt us to inquire further as to the nature of biblical spirituality.

A similar and not unrelated case has to do with the doctrine of redemption. There is no doubt that one of the central themes of Scripture is redemption. But what we have been taught to understand by "redemption" and by "salvation" is hardly to be found in the Older Testament, if at all. If life after death is indeed the central message of Scripture, isn't it odd that in most of the Older Testament it is not even mentioned, and that Christians have to hunt carefully in order to find what might be a reference to it in the book of Job or in the Psalms? This is not to say that the Bible is not concerned with life after death, nor that such life is not a fundamental aspect of Christian hope. It is to say that, no matter how true the promise of such life is, that promise is not the central thrust of Scripture.

Were it not for the presence of the Older Testament, we could be content with the commonly held notion, that the Good News of Jesus is that there is life after death, and that this life is available through Him. It is true that the New Testament affirms that there is life after death. But this was well known by the Pharisees long before the advent of Jesus, and therefore would hardly be "good news" to them. The core of the good news is that the resurrection has already begun in the raising of Jesus from the dead. This certainly means that we can trust in Him for our final resurrection. But even more, it means that the long-awaited promises have now begun to be fulfilled. The Reign of God has dawned. Life after death is good news. But it is not all the good news, for the Older Testament reminds us that the scope of God's action and revelation includes much more than life after death. The witness of the Older Testament reminds us that God's salvation is not purely "spiritual," in the common sense of that term, but is also political and social.

The Political Agenda

The understanding of the Bible as a book which deals essentially with "spiritual salvation" after death can be proven to be the result of the introduction of Christianity into the Greco-Roman world, with its preconceived notions of the nature of religion. But it is more than a historical accident, for it also carries with it a political agenda. That political agenda, simply put, is to make God apolitical. If God is primarily interested in the salvation of souls, and not in bodies and in how we distribute the things necessary for physical life, God is not interested in politics -- for politics is, after all, the process whereby a society decides how its material resources are to be allocated. And, if God is apolitical, it follows that believers ought to be equally apolitical, or at least that they ought not to mix faith and politics.

The problem is that, if it is true that human beings are political animals everything that we do has a political context and political consequences. Thus, the "apolitical" Christianity that many advocate is in truth a Christianity which supports the politics that exist, that is, the power of the powerful. What is usually meant by "mixing politics and religion" is very selective, depending on what kind of politics is actually being mixed with religion. To pray at the U.S. Congress, to preach in

the White House, or to "give the blessing" at a stockholders meeting is not political, and is therefore acceptable. But to speak at a farm workers' rally, to bless their efforts to organize, or to criticize the Immigration Service is political. To attend a prayer breakfast with the governor of Puerto Rico is not political. But to protest the presence of the Navy in Vieques is political. If one looks at the clear contradictions in such views, it is clear that the "apolitical" understanding of Christianity is very political indeed, and is intended to support the agenda of the status quo.

Therefore, the modern semi-Marcionite heresy is not just a theological error, or some innocent misconception we were taught in Sunday School. It is the theological arm of political conservatism. To this conservatism, it is important that the Older Testament be set aside, for it speaks too much of a God who demands justice in human dealings, and part of whose redemptive work has to do with the establishment of such justice.

These political conservatives can draw on the New Testament as the basis for their supposedly "apolitical" brand of Christianity, simply because the entire New Testament was written during a period when the People of God had little or no power, and therefore the ordering of society was not an agenda on which they could have an immediate or direct impact. The Older Testament, dealing as it does with centuries in the history of the People of God, deals with various political situations, and shows more concern for them than is shown in the New Testament. But when we read the New Testament through the preparation provided by the Older, we find that its view of the purposes of God is not as purely "spiritual" as we are told by "apolitical" Christians.

What we then need is a new reading of Scripture, so to say, "in Spanish." Since the time of the Reformation, and particularly in Protestant circles thereafter, there has been great emphasis on making the Bible available in the vernacular. We have usually thought that the significance of this was simply that people could now read for themselves what previously was reserved for scholars. But perhaps we ought to see another dimension in what happens when the Bible is read in the vernacular. It becomes the people's book, no longer under the control of those who control society. When the people read the Bible, and read it from their own perspective rather than from the perspective of the powerful, the Bible becomes a mighty political book. This is what I mean by "reading the Bible in Spanish": a reading which begins with the realization that the Bible is a political book; a reading in the "vernacular," not only in the cultural, linguistic sense, but also in the socio-political sense. In the high Andes, the equivalent of our reading in Spanish could be a reading in Quechua, and from the perspective of the Quechua-speaking peoples oppressed by the Spanish-speaking.

The Grammar of This New Reading

In another book, my wife and I have suggested some guidelines or procedures for this new reading.³ Without repeating what was said there, the following outline of a "grammar" for reading the Bible "in Spanish" may be useful:

³J. L. González and C. G. González, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), pp. 69-93.

1) To say that the Bible is a political book means, first of all, that it deals with issues of power and powerlessness. This is the fundamental political question, and it is also one of the central issues in Scripture. Read your Bible again. Read it "in Spanish," that is, as an exile, as a member of a powerless group, as someone who is excluded from the "innocent" history of the dominant group, and you will see that it is indeed a political book. When you approach a text, ask first, not the "spiritual" question nor the "doctrinal" question -- the Bible is not primarily a book about "spiritual" reality, except in its own sense, nor is it a book about doctrines -- but the political questions: who in this text is in power?; who is powerless?; what is the nature of their relationship?; whose side does God take? In this approach to Scripture lies the beginning of a Hispanic American theology, as well as the heart of the new reformation of the twentieth century.

2) Remember that only a small portion of Scripture was originally written to be read in private. Spanish, like Greek and Hebrew, distinguishes between the singular and plural forms of the second person. The singular "you" as a form of address to the reader appears rarely in Scripture -- the most notable exceptions are Philemon, I and II Timothy, and Titus. Unfortunately, English no longer makes a distinction between the singular and the plural forms of "you." The old King James Version "ye" is no longer used. Therefore, when we read a biblical injunction addressed to "you," particularly when reading the Bible in private, we tend to think of each of us as an individual, and not of all of us as a community. This leads to the privatization of faith and its demands -- a subject to which we shall return. In order to avoid this, the "grammar" for a new reading of Scripture, so to speak, "in Spanish" must be aware that, even when we read Scripture in private, God is addressing all of us as a community of faith.

3) Remember that the core principle of Scriptural "grammar" is its availability to children, to the simple, to the poor. Jesus rejoices "that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21). To read the Bible "in Spanish" means to give attention to what the "babes" find in it. This may not be as sophisticated as what we find in our commentaries. It probably will not be as "religious" nor as "inspiring." But it may well be truer to the message of Scripture. Thus, the ABCs of this grammar are to be found in providing opportunity for those who do not usually form part of our Bible study groups to read Scripture and tell us what it says to them in their situation. As we do this, we may well be shocked. But we may also be saved.

Resumen

El presente artículo trata sobre una relectura hispana de la Biblia. El punto de partida de tal relectura, en contraste con el de la cultura dominante, es una visión no inocente de la historia. En las Escrituras, los personajes no se nos presentan como inmaculados, sino como seres humanos envueltos en ambigüedades semejantes a la nuestras. Los hispanos, por varias razones, hemos aprendido una historia semejante y es a partir de ella que hemos de leer las Escrituras. Al mismo tiempo, esto tiene razones e implicaciones políticas, pues la lectura supuestamente inocente de la historia por parte de la cultura dominante es en realidad un modo de justificar las condiciones y los privilegios presentes.

Anuncio

Simposio II: Redescubrimiento 500 Años de Cristianismo Hispano

Octubre 6-8 de 1989

uspiciado por el
Programa de Instructores Hispanos
Programa México-Americano
Escuela de Teología Perkins
Southern Methodist University

Este será el segundo de tres simposios en preparación para la conmemoración 1992 de la llegada de Cristóbal Colón, y con él de la introducción de la iglesia cristiana hispana en el hemisferio occidental.

Los temas generales que se discuten en los tres simposios son:

*Una relectura de la historia

*La misión de la iglesia hispana

*Una pastoral hispana

Buscamos pastores y otros líderes que participen con grupos en sus congregaciones en un proceso de reflexión sobre estos tres temas. Se espera que por menos el pastor o líder del grupo, y otra persona, participen del simposio en octubre.

Si tiene interés en asistir, o en dirigir un grupo de su congregación en el proceso de reflexión (a base de encuestas enviadas por los organizadores del simposio), favor de comunicarse con:

Dr. Roy D. Barton, Director
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